

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?  
 SERMON: *Abundant Life*  
 SCRIPTURE: John 10:10  
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black  
 DATE: January 1, 2012

Do you have any New Year's resolutions yet? If not, please allow me to help. Here are the top ten New Year's resolutions according to about.com.

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| 1. Spend more time with family and friends. | 6. Quit drinking.       |
| 2. Fit in fitness.                          | 7. Get out of debt.     |
| 3. Tame the bulge.                          | 8. Learn something new. |
| 4. Quit smoking.                            | 9. Help others.         |
| 5. Enjoy life more.                         | 10. Get organized.      |

These all seem to be good resolutions to me. What do you think? I'm sure you could add to the list and maybe there are things you would want to subtract from the list, but I'm also sure there are at least a couple of items on this list you would like to give attention to in the New Year (and have been on your list for years ☺).

I am a fan of New Year's resolutions. I like to look back on the previous year, celebrate the good and ask what I can do differently in the New Year. In fact Tom Macy told me yesterday that January is named after the Roman god Janus who was said to have two faces, one that looked backward into the past and one that looked forward into the future. Looking back at our lives last year and forward to the New Year is a good exercise, but as Christians we believe that there is more to life than the coming year. We believe life goes on into eternity and hopefully we try to live our lives with an eternal perspective. So I want to ask a question this morning to help frame any resolutions you may have or may be making in the coming days. What place do New Year's resolutions have in light of eternity?

To answer that question I want to look at the topic of eternal life as we find it presented in the writings of John the Evangelist. We will take a break from our usual practice of looking at one passage of Scripture and take a 10,000 foot look at eternal life in many passages throughout John's writings.

Eternal life is one of the main topics of the Gospel of John, which we have been studying now since the middle of August. John's stated purpose of writing his Gospel is so that his readers would "*believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing they would have life [eternal life] in his name*" (Jn. 20:31). Then when we turn to 1 John, a letter John wrote to churches in modern day Turkey, we see that the topic of eternal life is still really important to him. His stated purpose in writing this letter is so that his readers [believers] would be able to know if they had eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13).

I want to answer two questions this morning. First, what is eternal life? And second, how can we know if we have eternal life? I have three answers to each question. So if you're doing the

math, that's six points. Then at the end we'll come back to the question, "What place do New Year's resolutions have in light of eternity?"

***Eternal life is new life.***

In John 3 we are introduced explicitly to the concept of eternal life (v. 15). In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus Jesus says eternal life in the eternal kingdom comes only from being born again.

**John 3:3 (ESV)**

*Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Eternal life requires spiritual rebirth. Eternal life is not a new lease on life or turning over a new leaf in your life; eternal life is an entirely new life.<sup>1</sup> And Jesus says that new life is necessary. "...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God...you must be born again" (Jn. 3:3, 5, 7).

The reason we must be born again is because we are dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). In one sense all of us here this morning are alive and well – we're not dead (at least not yet). We all are breathing, we're able to think (to one degree or another), to feel, to act.<sup>2</sup> But although we're alive physically, the Bible tells us that spiritually we are dead in our sin. So, in order to have eternal life we have to be given new life. Eternal life does not come through new religious resolve; it comes only through an entirely new life. But you cannot make yourself born again – you cannot conjure up eternal life – it must be given by God.

**John 1:12–13 (ESV)**

*...to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Just like there is nothing a baby does to make itself born physically, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves born again spiritually; God is the one who makes dead sinners alive together with Christ (Col. 2:13).

***Eternal life will be accompanied by faith.***

However, while there is nothing we can do to make ourselves alive spiritually, all who have been made alive by God have also placed their faith in Christ. Everyone who is born again believes that Jesus is the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world (cf. Jn. 1:29; 20:31). So how do you know if you have eternal life? Eternal life will be accompanied by faith.

Almost every reference to eternal life in the book of John is accompanied by a statement about faith or belief. I'll simply give a couple of examples.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Grounded in God's Grace," Sermon on John 3:1-21, September 25, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Finally Alive*, 29.

**John 3:15–16 (ESV)**

*...whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

**John 5:24 (ESV)**

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

So if eternal life is an entirely new life given by God and whoever believes possess this new life then how does that inform our approach to our life in this New Year; how does that inform our approach to New Year’s resolutions?

Our culture has placed a high value on reinventing yourself and promoting yourself. If you don’t constantly reinvent yourself and promote yourself you risk your chances of maintaining a good reputation. We are made to believe this is the case in the marketplace as well as in the social lives of individuals. Therefore, many New Year’s resolutions are an attempt to reinvent yourself; to put on the new you in the New Year.

But if you believe in Christ then you are a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17); you have been born again. So while *resolutions* may be good, any attempt to recreate or reinvent yourself seems to be misguided at a minimum or even a slap in the face to our God-given identity in Christ. We are children of God through rebirth. Surely there is no new identity that is more significant than that. Make sure your resolutions are in line with the reality that you are born-again children of God in Christ and do not attempt to be somebody you are not or somebody you wish to be.

If you do not yet believe, I would urge you to place your faith in Christ this morning. Believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God came to die for your sins. If you repent of your sins and believe this good news you can become a new child of God this New Year’s Day. Without Jesus you are dead in your sins without God and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). There is no resolution you could make this year that could possibly improve your standing before a holy God. Your only hope is to place your faith in Jesus Christ.

A resolution to improve your relationships this year would at best seem secondary if you remain estranged from the holy God who created you. And a resolution to get your body in shape in 2012 would seem quite secondary if you will one day die and lose your soul (cf. Jn. 12:25). Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be made new.

Let’s now look at the second thing that John teaches us about eternal life.

***Eternal life is qualitative as well as quantitative.***

When people think of eternal life, many people think of it simply in terms of time. Eternal life is everlasting life – it’s a long time. This is true, but John presents eternal life as more than just everlasting life.

**John 10:10 (ESV)**

*...I came that they may have life [eternal life] and have it abundantly.*

John 10 presents eternal life as abundant life, or life to the fullest as some translations read. Eternal life is not only an entirely new life; it's an entirely new *kind* of life.<sup>3</sup> The reason eternal life is qualitatively different than the life we live before rebirth is because eternal life is bound up in a relationship with the eternal God.

**John 17:3 (ESV)**

*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

The very nature of eternal life is knowledge of God.<sup>4</sup> But it is important to note that in John knowledge of God doesn't refer to mere intellectual knowledge about God; there is no amount of knowledge about God that will earn one eternal life. No, knowledge of God refers to a personal relationship with God. John 10:14-15 makes this clear.

**John 10:14–15 (ESV)**

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

The relationship we have with Christ is like the relationship God the Father has with God the Son; it is a personal, intimate, eternal relationship. So how do we know we have eternal life?

***Eternal life will be accompanied by fellowship with God.***

John 15 describes knowledge of God in terms of an abiding relationship with Christ. This is an intimate fellowship. Without a relationship with God there is no eternal life. But faith and fellowship are not the only ways we'll know we have eternal life. Right after Jesus describes fellowship in terms of an abiding relationship he quickly points out that eternal-life fellowship will produce fruit.

**John 15:5 (ESV)**

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

***Eternal life will be accompanied by fruit.***

So the third way we can know we have eternal life is if there is fruit; eternal life will be accompanied by fruit. Fellowship with God produces fruit. There will be evidence of new life in all who are born again and live in relationship with God. The fruit is described generally as

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<sup>3</sup> John 4 presents eternal life as the quenching of spiritual thirst and John 6 as the satisfaction of spiritual hunger.

<sup>4</sup> And the reason for this is because eternal life is found only in God and in the Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 5:26), therefore only those who know God have eternal life.

keeping Christ's commandments, in obedience (Jn. 15:10), which is at the heart of Christian discipleship (Mt. 28:20).<sup>5</sup>

In a number of George Barna's studies he concludes that born-again Christians live just like the world. In John Piper's book *Finally Alive* he challenges Barna's assertion.<sup>6</sup> While people who *call themselves* born-again Christians and go to church may live just like the world, true born-again Christians who have eternal life do not live just like the world. Regenerate Christians are by no means perfect, but those who have eternal life will be transformed (cf. Phil. 1:6). There will be an upward trajectory toward Christ-likeness in our lives.

The bottom line in John's writings is that without fruit we have no confidence of eternal life and fellowship with God. I'll read a couple of verses to show this (cf. 1 Jn. 5:4, 18).

**1 John 2:29 (ESV)**

*If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

**1 John 3:9 (ESV)**

*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.*

Let me say again, the Christian life is not about perfection – only Christ is perfect – but those who know God and his Son will be transformed into the image of his Son. There will be a trajectory toward Christ-likeness over time. Those who have fellowship with the eternal God will bear fruit in keeping with their new life.

Before we move on, it's important to note a subtle but critical distinction in what I've been saying. Eternal life will produce the fruit of obedience, but I didn't say that obedience will produce eternal life. There is nothing you can do to earn eternal life. Only the eternal God can give eternal life and it is only through faith that we have eternal life, not through works of obedience. We must not put the cart before the horse. Eternal life produces the fruit of obedience, but obedience does not produce eternal life. Let's now look at the third thing John teaches us about eternal life.

***Eternal life is already/not yet.***

There is a common misconception that eternal life is something that only awaits us when we die. But while it is true that those who have placed their faith in Christ will live eternally after they die (Jn. 11:25), the Bible presents eternal life as beginning the moment a person is born again (Jn. 1:13; 3:3, 8). In other words, eternal life is already and not yet.

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<sup>5</sup> Specific fruit in John's writings include self-denial (Jn. 12:25) and especially love for other believers (cf. Jn. 17:23; 1 Jn. 4:7, et al.).

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Finally Alive*, 12-16.

**John 5:24–25 (ESV)**

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

<sup>25</sup>*“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*

Notice in verse 24 it says that whoever believes *has* eternal life; he *has* passed from death to life (cf. 1 Jn. 3:14). Eternal life is a present reality (already) for those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 20:31), sent to take away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29; 3:16). Then in verse 25 John refers to the final judgment and says that those who hear the voice of the Son of God will live (referring to the resurrection); they *will have* eternal life. Eternal life is a future reality (not yet) as well.

If we think that eternal life is somewhere off in the distance, something that *only* happens after we die, then what relevance does it have for us now? It gives us a proper perspective, yes. But if you understand eternal life to be already *and* not yet then it also makes a difference in how you live right now.

Stand up if your birthday is June 1<sup>st</sup>? How many of you are getting ready for that birthday party now? Not many of you, right? Stand up if your birthday is today? I suspect your birthday is having more of an impact on your day than the person whose birthday is in 6 months. If you understand that you have eternal life right now, then it makes a difference in the way you live right now.

I’ve given three ways that you can know you have eternal life, through faith in Christ, fellowship with God, and bearing fruit. If eternal life is already and not yet, then it is available right now. So you can place your faith in Christ right now. If eternal life is already and not yet, then you can experience fellowship with God right now and seek to cultivate fellowship with God through reading his Word and spending time in prayer right now. If eternal life is already and not yet, then you can and should be bearing fruit right now. You can be a disciple of Jesus Christ right now, who seeks to obey the Word of God.

You are not yet perfected. That will come in the future, when Christ returns. We do not yet live in a perfect world untainted by sin and death. That too will come in the future when Christ returns. Right now we can look forward to that day, but we can also experience the abundant nature of eternal life right now through faith, fellowship, and fruit bearing.

Let’s review what we’ve learned so far. We’ve learned that eternal life is new life, it is qualitative and quantitative, and it’s already and not yet. And we’ve learned that we can know we have eternal life if we have faith in Christ, fellowship with God, and bear fruit. So in light of what we’ve learned about eternal life let’s return to our original question. What place do New Year’s resolutions have in light of eternity?

New Year’s resolutions are not bad. In fact I would say they are a good thing. After all we are called in Scripture to make every effort to supplement our faith with godliness (2 Pt. 1:3-11); we are called to work out our salvation knowing that God works in us (Phil. 2:12-13). Many of the

great men and women of faith have been people who have lived out their faith with great intentionality. I think of Jonathan Edwards' who had 26 resolutions he reviewed daily.<sup>1</sup>

But resolutions, while potentially a useful thing, should not be an attempt to recreate or reinvent ourselves. And they should not be aimed at self-promotion. If we are believers we are already new creations. Our identity is wrapped up entirely in Christ and our lives are to be lived entirely for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). If you are not yet a believer your first order of business in light of eternity is to repent of your sin and believe on Jesus Christ. Then and only then will you be able to live an abundant life, resolutions or no resolutions.

Some of you may need to adjust your resolutions in light of this teaching on eternal life. And some of you may need to sit down and ask yourself how you might live more intentionally in the coming year in light of eternity. Whatever we resolve to do in the New Year, or at any point, should fit in and support who we are in Christ, it should promote faith, fellowship, and fruit in keeping with our identity in Christ. If that is the nature of your resolutions, then I want to encourage you to live life to the fullest this year through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Benediction**

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ESV)**

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Jonathan Edwards Resolutions:

1. Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration; without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved, to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved, so to do, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever.
2. Resolved, To be continually endeavouring to find out some new contrivance and invention to promote the forementioned things.
3. Resolved, If ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.
4. Resolved, Never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God, nor be, nor suffer it, if I can possibly avoid it.
5. Resolved, Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
6. Resolved, To live with all my might, while I do live.
7. Resolved, Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.
8. Resolved, To act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings, as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God. Vid. July 30.
9. Resolved, To think much, on all occasions, of my dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.
10. Resolved, when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom, and of hell.

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11. Resolved, When I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances do not hinder. xxi
  12. Resolved, If I take delight in it as a gratification of pride, or vanity, or on any such account, immediately to throw it by.
  13. Resolved, To be endeavouring to find out fit objects of liberality and charity.
  14. Resolved, Never to do anything out of revenge.
  15. Resolved, Never to suffer the least motions of anger towards irrational beings.
  16. Resolved, Never to speak evil of any one, so that it shall tend to his dishonour, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.
  17. Resolved, That I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.
  18. Resolved, To live so, at all times, as I think is best in my most devout frames, and when I have the clearest notions of the things of the gospel, and another world.
  19. Resolved, Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trump.
  20. Resolved, To maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.
  21. Resolved, Never to do anything, which if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him.
  22. Resolved, To endeavour to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigour, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.
  23. Resolved, Frequently to take some deliberate action, which seems most unlikely to be done, for the glory of God, and trace it back to the original intention, designs, and ends of it; and if I find it not to be for God's glory, to repute it as a breach of the fourth Resolution.
  24. Resolved, Whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then, both carefully endeavour to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.
  25. Resolved, To examine carefully and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and so direct all my forces against it.
  26. Resolved, To cast away such things as I find do abate my assurance